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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13
AID-05 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /075 W
----------121033Z 010374 /11
R 111720Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3302
INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 1067

USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LE, IS, SY
SUBJECT: SYRIAN AND ISRAELI INTENTIONS TOWARDS LEBANON

1. SUMMARY: SYRIAN AND ISRAELI INTENTIONS REGARDING LEBANON ARE A SUBJECT OF CONSIDERABLE LOCAL SPECULATION. WHILE WE HAVE BEEN GIVING ASSURANCES THAT WE THINK LEBANESE FEARS ARE EXAGGERATED, WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT DAMASCUS AND TEL AVIV THINK. END SUMMARY.

2. AS I TALK WITH LEBANESE AND MY DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF RECURRING POLITICAL QUESTIONS WHICH COME UP: (1) THE OUTLOOK FOR PARTITION OR POLITICAL DECENTRALIZATION, (2) ISRAEL'S AIMS IN SOUTH LEBANON, AND (3) SYRIA'S ULTIMATE INTENTIONS HERE. IT WILL SURPRISE NO ONE FAMILIAR WITH THIS PLACE TO LEARN THAT MOST LEBANESE BELIEVE THE ULTIMATE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS REST WITH US.
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THUS, WHEN I CALLED ON HIM ON MARCH 9, SAEB SALAM SAID HIS MARONITE FRIENDS WANTED TO KNOW WHAT THE AMERICAN GAME BEHIND SYRIA WAS. DID WE KNOW THAT THE SYRIANS WERE WORKING NIGHT AND DAY TO INSTALL THE LEBANESE BAATH IN STRATEGIC POSITIONS AND THAT THERE WAS GREAT LEBANESE CONCERN ABOUT SYRIA'S INTENTIONS? HAD THE AMERICANS IMPOSED THE SYRIANS

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ON LEBANON FOR SOME ULTERIOR PURPOSE OF THEIR OWN,
AND HOW DID IT RELATE TO ISRAEL?

3. SIMILARLY, WHILE EVERYONE REJOICES IN MYTHICAL
ASSURANCES THE PRESS ALLEGES I HAVE GIVEN SARKIS
AND BOUTROS THAT THE ISRAELIS WILL NOT ATTACK
LEBANON, THERE IS MUCH CONCERN ABOUT ISRAEL'S
INTENTIONS TOWARD THE SOUTH. THE ACTIVE ROLE THE
ISRAELIS ARE PLAYING IN SUPPORTING A MUTINOUS FACTION
OF THE FORMER LEBANESE ARMY, ALLEGEDLY WITH FMS-SUPPLIED
EQUIPMENT AND AMMUNITION, IS TOO EVIDENT TO BE DENIED,
AND THE INCREASING MARONITE (CHAMOUNIST IN
PARTICULAR) COOPERATION WITH ISRAEL IS AN OPEN
SCANDAL. (ACCORDING TO THE KUWAITI AMBASSADOR,
PIERRE GEMAYEL ASSURED ARAFAT IN HIS PRESENCE THAT
THE KATAEB WAS EVEN MORE OBDURATE THAN FATAH IN
OPPOSING PEACE AT ANY PRICE WITH ISRAEL AND IN
SUPPORTING THE CONCEPT OF A SECULAR STATE IN
PALESTINE, AND DENIED ALLEGATIONS THAT THERE
HAD BEEN ANY PHALANGE-ISRAELI COOPERATION. WE
ARE SKEPTICAL OF THIS DENIAL, BUT AT LEAST HE MADE
IT. CHAMOUN HAS NOT.)

4. WE ARE OF COURSE HELD ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE
FOR ISRAEL'S ACTIONS, SINCE MANY LEBANESE, LIKE
GEMAYEL, STILL CLAIM TO BELIEVE THAT WE NEED ONLY
TELL THAT STATE TO SHAPE UP AND IT WILL DO SO. THAT
WE ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR SYRIA IS SOMETHING OF A
SWITCH, BUT THE LEBANESE ARE ACCUSTOMED TO THINKING IN
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SUCH TERMS, SO IT COMES QUITE NATURALLY TO THEM
TO ASSUME THAT ASAD IS WORKING FOR US NOW,
PARTICULARLY WHEN WE ANNOUNCE OUR MOST RECENT
AID TO THAT COUNTRY AND THEY MAKE INVIDIOUS
COMPARISON WITH WHAT LEBANON IS GETTING. HAVE
JUST SEEN FBIS REPORT OF RAYMOND EDDE'S MARCH 8
STATEMENT TO PARIS DIPLOMATIC PRESS ABOUT
AMERICAN PLOT TO GIVE AKKAR, TRIPOLI AND BEQAA
TO SYRIA IN EXCHANGE FOR GOLAN. EDDE COMMENTS,
"SYRIA WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO INDULGE IN THIS
DEADLY GAME...IF IT HAD NOT GOTTEN THE GO-AHEAD
FROM WASHINGTON.") EDDE IS NOT ALONE IN THIS OPINION.

5. MY ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON BOTH SUBJECTS HAVE
BEEN: (1) WE DO NOT HAVE IMPRESSION SYRIANS INTEND
PERMANENT OCCUPATION OF LEBANON AND BELIEVE THEY
WILL LEAVE WHEN SITUATION HERE STABILIZES. MEANWHILE,
SYRIAN MONKEYING WITH BAATH HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE
OF LEBANESE GETTING TOGETHER TO RESTORE THEIR

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OWN ARMY AND AGREEING ON THEIR FUTURE SO THEY CAN INVITE SYRIANS TO LEAVE. (2) WE DO NOT THINK ISRAELIS INTEND TO INVADE OR OCCUPY SOUTH. THEIR INTERFERENCE THERE ALSO HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR LEBANESE TO SETTLE THEIR OWN INTERNAL PROBLEMS SO THEY CAN ALSO ASK ISRAELIS TO STOP MEDDLING.

6. HAVING SAID THIS TO MY INTERLOCUTORS, I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT WE REALLY THINK THE INTENTIONS OF LEBANON'S NEIGHBORS ARE. FOR BOTH SYRIA AND ISRAEL, INSTABILITY IN LEBANON POSES PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES. IT HAS PROVIDED SYRIANS WITH CHANCE TO PROP UP MINORITY PARTY LINKED TO THEM

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 1067

USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

AND WHEN AND IF THEY LEAVE, THE LEBANESE BAATH, THE COMMUNISTS, THE OLD PPS, WHICH HAS REMARKABLY COME TO LIFE AGAIN, THE KATAEB AND POSSIBLY CHAMOUN'S PNL WILL BE THE ONLY ORGANIZED POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE COUNTRY. A LEBANESE BAATH PARTY ARMED AND SUPPORTED BY THE SYRIANS, AND INSTALLED IN KEY POSITIONS, WOULD BE ABLE TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN LOCAL POLITICS, FOR BETTER OR WORSE. NO ONE WHO HAS SEEN MODERN SYRIA OR IRAQ, OF COURSE, WOULD WISH THE BAATH ON ANYONE, BUT IT WOULD OFFER A THEORETICAL ALTERNATIVE TO OTHER

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EXTREMES OF BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT WHICH COULD WELL
ATTRACT MANY PEOPLE. MARONITE AND MODERATE
SUNNI CONCERN IS UNDERSTANDABLE.

7. SIMILARLY, THE ISRAELIS HAVE PROFITED FROM
THE LEBANESE CRISIS (ASIDE FROM THE RESPITE IT GAVE
THEM FROM OUR SERIOUSLY PUSHING FURTHER SETTLEMENT
EFFORTS ALL LAST YEAR) IN ESTABLISHING THEIR SO-CALLED
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"GOOD FENCE" AND IN ATTEMPTING TO SET UP A BUFFER
ZONE ALONG THE FRONTIER. SOME MIGHT REGARD THIS AS A CYNICAL
MOVE TO EXPLOIT LEBANON'S AGONY FOR THEIR OWN ENDS,
BUT THE ISRAELIS FIRST OBLIGATION IS TO THEMSELVES, AND
THEIR GRASPING AT THIS OPPORTUNUITY IS UNDERSTANDABLE.
THE QUESTION REMAINS AS TO THEIR ULTIMATE INTENTIONS.
HAVING ASSERTED THE RIGHT TO DETERMINE WHOM AND
WHAT THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT CAN SEND INTO
SOUTHERN LEBANON, AND THAT NOTHING CAN BE
ALLOWED TO INTERFERE WITH THEIR BILATERAL
RELATIONS WITH A PORTION OF THE LEBANESE PUBLIC
(SHADES OF THE UNEQUAL TREATIES WITH CHINA),
WHAT OTHER PRIVILEGE DO THEY INTEND TO ASSERT OVER
THAT AREA? PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY, HOW
ACTIVELY ARE THEY SUPPORTING MARONITE SEPARATIST
AMBITIONS? WE UNDERSTAND THERE ARE ISRAELIS NOW
LOCATED IN JOUNIEH WHO ARE MAINTAINING LIAISON
WITH THE CHAMOUNISTS AND WITH LEBANESE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS. IS THIS MERELY TO COORDINATE
MILITARY EFFORTS IN THE SOUTH, OR IS IT CONNECTED
WITH A SCHEME TO SUPPORT CREATION OF AN INDEPENDENT
CHRISTIAN STATE? IS THERE A GRAND ISRAELI PLAN, OR
ARE THEY MERELY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES
OFFERED?

8. WOULD APPRECIATE ANY VIEWS DEPARTMENT, DAMASCUS
OR TEL AVIV MIGHT HAVE ON THESE QUESTIONS.
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